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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CUBA, MOLDOVA, GITMO, COUNTER-PIRACY,
UNFCCC, ITALY, DEMOCRACY

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- 1. Lead Stories Summary

Early evening newscasts by ZDF-TV's Heute and ARD-TV's Tagesschau opened with stories on German government plan's to expand the car-scrapping bonus. Newspapers led with various stories, including counter-piracy, and the change in leadership at Deutsche Bahn.

- 2. (U.S.-Cuba) Congressional Delegation in Cuba

"Barack Obama is getting serious about the beginning of the end of the blockade of the regime that has now existed for more than 47 years," Sueddeutsche Zeitung editorialized, and added: "For the Castro brothers, the new openness is a greater challenge than the blockade measures that were imposed by the Bush government. An invasion of [U.S.] tourists could be more dangerous for the regime than the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs. If there is no longer an enemy image, it will become increasingly difficult to explain to the Cubans why they behave as if they are on a besieged island and forego wealth and freedom. For the old Castros, it is time to acknowledge that their revolution is over. Obama's offer would now be an act of decency. They could end their internal blockade, a kind of second revolution in Cuba so to speak."

- 3. (Moldova) Unrest

ARD-TV's primetime Tagesschau reports that "the protests against the government in the former Soviet Republic of Moldova have ebbed away.

Police officers are patrolling in the streets of the center of Chisinau. Thousands of protesters had stormed the parliament the day before and accused the government of election fraud. The president accused Romania of being behind the protests. Bucharest rejected the allegations. Moldova was part of Romania until 1940."

Frankfurter Allgemeine comments: "The Communist Party in the Republic of Moldova has won the elections again. Although it appears odd that the party holds exactly the 61 votes necessary to elect the president, irregularities during the election will be difficult to prove. The violent protests, which were quickly ended by a massive police operation, probably rather damaged the opposition parties. In Moldova, we cannot expect another colorful revolution."

Under the headline "Longing for Europe," Handelsblatt editorializes: "Unnoticed by the world, a torturing process is going on in Moldova 18 years after its declaration of independence. This is a process all countries of the Balkans and the former Soviet sphere of power - apart from Belarus - have already gone through. Moldova just can't cut the cord to Moscow. We cannot really accuse the victorious Communists of manipulating the elections.... The fact that the young people started riots in the streets and stormed the parliament can be explained only by their frustration. The young people want a new beginning and to join Europe. This is their right. However, it does not justify the violence.... Apart from economic assistance, the country cannot expect much from Europe. The events are not important for Brussels as long as there is no second Georgian case on the EU's south-eastern flank. The young people are angry and feel abandoned. This is the bitter lesson in a forgotten country."

14. (U.S.) Renditions, ICRC Report

Die Welt editorializes on the confidential ICRC reports on alleged mistreatment of Guantanamo detainees that "the CIA's policy after 2001 is a disgrace to the West's value community. The paper notes that "the ICRC report discloses a world that falls short of the standard of countries with which we want to share values."

15. (Somalia) Fate of Pirates

Sueddeutsche Zeitung deals with the problem of what to do with Somali pirates after their arrest and opined: "In principle it is right to put African pirates on trial in the region. Since Somalia does not function as a state, it is now up to Kenya to try them. But if pirates fire at a Bundeswehr ship, it will not create a good impression if four Federal Ministries are at odds with each other about whether it would be too much for Germany to put several alleged bandits on trial and whether the situation could get even worse if the seven applied for asylum. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the EU 'Atalanta' mission lacks a uniform and efficient criminal prosecution. According to all previous experience, an International Criminal Court on Piracy would really be the best answer. It should have its seat in Kenya and pronounce judgments according to international standards."

16. (Environment) Bonn UNFCCC

Frankfurter Rundschau comments: "The good news of the UN climate conference in Bonn is that the U.S. rejoined the negotiations on global climate. Concerning Kyoto, Washington applied the brakes for almost 15 years. However, the conference also made clear that the global climate summit in Copenhagen is still a long way away.... A signal is due during the next G8 summit in July in Italy."

17. (Italy) Berlusconi on Earthquake Victims

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung said: "Italian crisis management has learned its lessons from the earthquake in Irpinia in 1980 and in Umbria in 1997. Firefighters, police officers, Carabinieri, and the military arrived quickly to help. Civil defense organizations were able to rely on [emergency] plans and reserves. Prime Minister Berlusconi talked a lot - and sometimes he said even strange things - but he acted purposefully, like a company owner who wanted to resolve problems but did not want to talk... He and his ministers conveyed the impression that they were prepared for such a situation, that they knew which measures to take and that they would not leave the people alone. Government and the rescue sources are still far away from being perfect, but they have backed the affected people to keep them from sinking into misery, and the rest of the nation to offer reasonable assistance."

In the view of Tagesspiegel, "Silvio Berlusconi again put his foot in it. He is a master at doing this. He has not learned his

lesson, not even the dying in the debris can refrain him from making embarrassing statements that are as numerous as the grains of sand on the Adriatic coast. In reality, the term 'embarrassing' is too weak for the things he inflicts on others. With his clowneries, Berlusconi is exposing his country to ridicule, he defames Italy. And nowhere in Italian politics is anyone in sight who could save Italy."

Regional daily Ostsee Zeitung of Rostock opined: "We can rely on Silvio Berlusconi: If there is some way for him to put his foot in it, then the Italian political lout will do so. Yesterday, the media billionaire, in his capacity as prime minister, added another 'pearl' to his anthology of quotations. He compared the misery of the homeless people in L'Aquila with a 'camping weekend.' Italy is certainly a special case. It is a country where Berlusconi has become the prime minister for the fourth time thanks to his power in the media. Nevertheless, Berlusconi is the living evidence of not gaining in stature in an office that is being transferred to him."

Thanks for this, Silvio!"

Regional daily Nuernberger Zeitung argued: "Those who have lost their legs do not need to spend money on shoes, and if a roof collapses during an earthquake, the people affected can be delighted with a camping holiday paid for by the state. This is the view of Italy's Prime Minister Berlusconi. Disasters cannot shock a man like him, since he is a disaster himself. Is it worthwhile saying a word about him? Especially during crises, the world loves this clown. As long as he governs, the whole world is like a circus, and nothing is really serious. Not everyone lives in L'Aquila."

18. (Eastern Europe) Democracy

According to Sueddeutsche Zeitung, "a fatal tendency for authoritarian structures and defiant, sometimes aggressive, but always irresponsible foreign policy have turned the democratic wonder children [Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan] into trouble spots for the international community. Why is this so? Was Western solidarity too small, pressure from Moscow too great? Has the time for radical regime change expired? This would be depressing, but this is not the case. Each of the former colorful revolutions has failed in its own way. But they all have in common that they were not revolutions. The authoritarian system was not changed, only the personnel. All trailblazers [of the past] now have high-ranking government positions. To resolve conflicts through compromises is strange to them. They continue their often disgusting traditions: corruption, paranoia, violence. America and Russia do everything possible to polarize the situation, and Europe is turning to other problems. But this cannot distract attention from the responsibility for the failure [of these revolutions]."

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